

REMARKS

Claims 1, 3, 5-7, and 9-11 remain pending in this application. Claims 1, 3, and 5, the independent claims, have been amended to define still more clearly what Applicants regard as their invention. Claims 12-14 and 16-19 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer of subject matter.

Claims 1, 3, 5-7, 9-14, and 16-19 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite. In particular, the Office Action states with respect to the independent claims that it is not clear as to what the phrase “a period longer than a predetermined time” means since the claims elsewhere do not mention “predetermined time”.

First, cancellation of Claims 12-14 and 16-19 renders the rejections of those claims moot.

The rejected claims have been carefully reviewed and amended as deemed necessary to ensure that they conform fully to the requirements of Section 112, second paragraph, with special attention to the points raised in paragraph 3 of the Office Action. In particular, Applicants have amended Claims 1, 3, and 5 to recite that the predetermined time is set by the user in advance. It is believed that the rejection under Section 112, second paragraph, has been obviated, and its withdrawal is therefore respectfully requested.

Claims 1, 3, 5-7, 9-14, and 16-19 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being obvious from U.S. Patent 6,330,022 (Seligmann) in view of U.S. Patent 6,025,870 (Hardy) and U.S. Patent 6,195,104 (Lyons).

First, cancellation of Claims 12-14 and 16-19 renders the rejections of those claims moot.

Claim 1 is directed to a control method for a home office system that includes user terminal devices each of which includes a display device. A virtual spaces providing step provides a virtual space on a display device for each user of the user terminal devices. A monitoring step monitors a period when the attitude of a user is continuously toward the display device based on an image of the user picked up by a camera. A control step automatically changes on each display device a display of a virtual space of the user to a display of a virtual space for rest when it is determined that the user should take a rest, based on a result obtained in the monitoring step that the attitude of the user is continuously toward the display device for a period longer than a predetermined time set by the user in advance, so that the user may informally communicate with other users present in a common virtual space for rest.

Among the notable features of Claim 1 are monitoring a period when the attitude of a user is continuously toward a display device based on an image of the user picked up by a camera, and automatically changing on each display device a display of a virtual space of the user to a display of a virtual space for rest when it is determined that the user should take a rest, based on a result that the attitude of the user is continuously toward the display device for a period longer than a predetermined time set by the user in advance.

Seligmann, as understood by Applicant, relates to a digital processing apparatus and method to support video conferencing in variable contexts. The Office Action concedes that Seligmann does not disclose automatically changing the display of a certain virtual space to a display of a virtual space for rest on the basis of the result in a monitoring step, and concedes that Seligmann does not teach automatically changing the

displayed virtual space of the user based on the physical condition of the user that is based on an image of the user picked up by the camera, but contends that those features are taught by Hardy and Lyon. Applicants respectfully disagree, and furthermore respectfully submit that none of Seligmann, Hardy, or Lyon teaches or suggests monitoring a period when the attitude of a user is continuously toward a display device, and when the attitude of the user is continuously toward the display device for a period longer than a predetermined time set by the user in advance, displaying the virtual space for rest, as recited in Claim 1.

Lyons, as understood by Applicants, relates to a system and method for permitting three-dimensional navigation through a virtual reality environment using camera-based gesture inputs. Using this methodology, the Lyons system can, for example, purportedly allow a user to seemingly kick a graphical soccer ball, by responding to the direction and speed from which the user approached a display screen. The system can also be used to implement home shopping applications, telecommunications applications and gesture based remote control. Apparently in Lyons a video display is located in front of the interaction area where system users stand, and a video camera electrically reads the images of users and the interaction area.

Therefore, Lyons merely reads the images of the users and the interaction area. Claim 1, on the other hand, monitors the period when the attitude of a user is continuously toward a display device.

Nothing in Lyons teaches or suggests monitoring a period when the attitude of a user is continuously toward a display device, and when the attitude of the user is continuously toward the display device for a period longer than a predetermined time set by the user in advance, displaying the virtual space for rest, as recited in Claim 1.

Hardy, as understood by Applicants, relates to automatic switching of video conferencing focus. More specifically, Hardy discloses a switch 30 for switching from local video information to remote video information and back again (see column 6, lines 34-45). The switching may depend on several things, including talk/listen notifications received from an audio processor, graphical information provided by a slide application and a manual selection made by the user.

The Office Action states, at page 4, that Hardy teaches that the event information provided by a notification allows the videoconferencing system to determine when the switching should occur. However, a hypothetical combination of Hardy with Seligmann and Lyons, even assuming such a combination to be permissible, would merely result in a system which brings about switching of the display screen even when the event information represents that the user left his or her desk

Applicants submit that nothing in Seligmann, Lyons, or Hardy, either separately or in any permissible combination (if any) teaches or suggests monitoring a period when the attitude of a user is continuously toward a display device, and when the attitude of the user is continuously toward the display device for a period longer than a predetermined time set by the user in advance, displaying the virtual space for rest, as recited in Claim 1.

Accordingly, Claim 1 is seen to be clearly allowable over Seligmann, Lyons, or Hardy, either separately or in any permissible combination (if any).

Independent Claims 3 and 5 are computer-readable storage medium and control apparatus claims, respectively, corresponding to method Claim 1, and are believed

to be patentable for at least the same reasons as discussed above in connection with Claim 1.

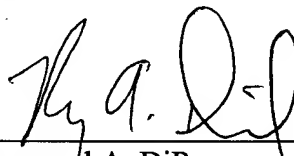
A review of the other art of record has failed to reveal anything which, in Applicants' opinion, would remedy the deficiencies of the art discussed above, as references against the independent claims herein. Those claims are therefore believed patentable over the art of record.

The other claims in this application are each dependent from Claim 5 discussed above and are therefore believed patentable for the same reasons. Since each dependent claim is also deemed to define an additional aspect of the invention, however, the individual reconsideration of the patentability of each on its own merits is respectfully requested.

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, Applicants respectfully request favorable reconsideration and early passage to issue of the present application.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our New York office by telephone at (212) 218-2100. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below listed address.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. A. DiPerna", written over a horizontal line.

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